

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9229

INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 2254

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR KS VS

SUBJECT: ROK VIEWS ON VIETNAM MAY BE SHIFTING

REF: SEOUL 2039

1. IN CONVERSATIONS EMBASSY HAS HAD IN PAST FEW DAYS WITH GOVERNMENT-ORIENTED OFFICIALS AND OBSERVERS, INCLUDING INFLUENTIAL DRP ASSEMBLY MEMBERS, WE HAVE IMPRESSION THAT CHAOTIC VIETNAM SITUATION HAS CAUSED SHIFT IN KOREAN THINKING ON REASON FOR GVN'S TROUBLES. AS LITTLE AS TWO WEEKS AGO, ALMOST ALL GOVERNMENT FIGURES WE SPOKE TO TENDED TO TAKE US TO TASK FOR FAILING TO PROVIDE MORE AID TO GVN AND FOR LEAVING A TRUSTED ALLY IN LURCH. SUDDEN AND MASSIVE COLLAPSE OF GVN RESISTANCE AND REPORTED LOSS OF ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF US-PROVIDED EQUIPMENT, HOWEVER, NOW BEING VIEWED BY SOME AS INDICATION THAT NO AMOUNT OF MATERIAL AID WOULD HAVE SAVED GVN AND THAT, IN FACT, US OVER THE YEARS HAD DONE ABOUT ALL THAT COULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTED TO HELP GVN.

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2. SUCH A VIEW, IF IT IS INDEED WIDELY HELD HERE, MAY TEMPER CONCERN ABOUT WHOLESAL E US PULL-OUT FROM ASIA AND ABOUT GENERAL RELIABILITY OF US AS ALLY. WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, THAT IT WILL HAVE MUCH EFFECT ON INCREASING ROK BELIEF THAT IT WILL HAVE TO PLACE GREATER EMPHASIS ON A SELF-RELIANT DEFENSE POSTURE. FOR WHATEVER THE CAUSE OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE COLLAPSE, THE KOREANS CONTINUE TO READ OUR WITHDRAWAL FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA AS A SIGN OF FUTURE REDUCTION IN OUR COMMITMENT IN NORTHEAST ASIA AS WELL.

3. A MORE DIRECT POSSIBLE EFFECT OF NEW PERCEPTION OF VIETNAM SITUATION MAY BE STRENGTHENED BELIEF THAT DISCIPLINE MUST BE TIGHTENED AT HOME. IF VIETNAM DEBACLE SEEN MORE AS RESULT OF INTERNAL ROT RATHER THAN WITHDRAWAL OF US AID, ROKG - WHICH LEANS IN ANY CASE TO TIGHT INTERNAL CONTROL AS NATIONAL SECURITY MEASURE - MAY BE CONVINCED MORE THAN EVER, THAT NEW RESTRAINTS AT HOME ARE NECESSARY. SOME GOVERNMENT FIGURES HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THIS MIGHT BE AN IDEA THE PRESIDENT IS ALREADY TOYING WITH DURING WHAT THEY SAY ARE HIS LONG PERIODS OF PREOCCUPATION WITH THE VIETNAM PROBLEM.

4. THESE IMPRESSIONS ARE SUPPORTERD BY ROK PRESS WHICH, WHILE IT CONTINUES TO BLAME USG (I.E. CONGRESS) FOR NOT UPHOLDING COMMITMENT TO VN. ALSO VIEWS COLLAPSE AS BEING DUE TO LACK OF COHESION ON PART OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE AND CAMBODIANS, AND NOTES THAT SITUATION ON KOREAN PENINSULA IS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THAT IN INDOCHINA. TONGA ILBO, FOR EXAMPLE POINTS OUT THAT ASIA IS VULNERABLE TO COMMUNIST INFILTRATION LARGELY DUE TO IGNORANCE AND PROVERTY, WHICH EVEN US NOT CAPABLE OF ERASING IN SHORT TIME. NONETHELESS, PRESS FEELS, KOREANS CAN LEARN LESSONS FROM INDOCHINA, PARTICULARLY THE NEED FOR SELF-RELIANCE AND NATIONAL UNITY.

5. PRESS ALSO APPEARS INCREASINGLY INCLINED TO SUPPORT NATIONAL UNITY THEME OF PRESIDENT PARK, WHO
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CAUTIONED APRIL 2 THAT INDOCHINA SHOULD NOT BE REGARDED AS A FIRE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER, AS NORTH KOREAN COMMUNISTS EMPLOY THE SAME TACTICS OF INSTIGATING ANTI-GOVERNMENT ELEMENTS AS THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN COMMUNISTS DO. GOVERNMENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE KOREA HERALD COMMENTED APRIL 4 THAT "PYONGYANG WILL ONLY TAKE HEART FROM THE AGONIZING US INACTION OVER THE INDOCHINESE TRAGEDY...THIS

REALITY SHOULD NOT BE BLURRED BY ANY WISHFUL THINKING
THAT MIGHT DWELL WITH THE US PRESENCE HERE." CITING
RECENT SPY CASE AND DMZ TUNNEL, HERALD CONCLUDED THAT
NATIONAL UNITY IS ESSENTIAL TO SECURITY. POINT ALSO
EMPHASIZED BY SINA ILBO, WHICH COMMENTED THAT "PARTISAN
INTERESTS OR STRATEGY CAN NEVER BE ALLOWED TO COME
BEFORE NATIONAL UNITY IN THIS TIME WHEN COMMUNISTS SHOW
NO REGARD FOR PEACE AGREEMENTS."
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